FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW

№ 188

To J. Comyns Carr
in acknowledgment of all I
owe to his friendship and
advice, these illustrations are
gratefully inscribed

Hugh Thomson

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Issue 188: Re: Your Application to the School of Unlikely Occurrences (Denied)

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."

--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded)
To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."

— Virgil, The Aeneid

The Oxo Archipelago: A Study in Starched Obsession

By Mosi Nia Zuhura Sauda

Newsreel: Cloggers Marooned. Starch Prices Soar. Maine Island Grips Population.

The island, Puffin Rock, off the coast of Maine, existed in a state of suspended animation, a geological shrug in the vast, uncaring Atlantic. The wind, that indefatigable prankster, perpetually rehearsed its lament, whipping the scent of brine and granite into a helix of such olfactory density it threatened to congeal. And on this desolate stage? A colony. Clog dancers, mind you, marooned by some forgotten caprice, perhaps a celestial misprint in the grand cosmic ledger. Their days, a relentless pageant, unfolded in starched-suit pantomime, each dawn a fresh calcification. Limbs, encased in the rigor of bespoke pinstripes, moved with the stiff-kneed precision of automatons, every gesture a testament to some arcane, utterly pointless ritual. The sea, meanwhile, kept up its tireless, murmuring commentary, a detached observer, or perhaps, merely a sound, like the background hum of a particularly dull refrigerator.

Headline: Gibohphobia. Dockets Pile. Senseless Whispers Pollute Air.

Otto, a creature of gaunt rectitude, his jawline carved with the surgical precision of a particularly meticulous taxidermist, paced with the fretful urgency of a man who'd just remembered he'd left the oven on for eternity. His eyes, small and restless as agitated beetles caught in a particularly vile jam, perpetually scoured the horizon for some perceived infraction, some fleeting deviation from the unwritten code that governed their

exquisitely pointless existence. He was the archivist, the chief chronicler of their collective disquiet, perpetually clutching a stack of legal dockets, their crisp edges radiating an almost palpable aura of mute accusation. Whump-clack, whump-clack, the industrial stapler articulated a monotonous rhythm, a percussive counterpoint to the island's raw, elemental symphony, a sound as comforting as a dentist's drill. Each docket, a meticulously detailed chronicle of a whispered slight, a glance deemed subversive, a gesture interpreted as a challenge, would then be, with a flourish of damning finality that would make even a jaded undertaker sit up, slipped into the breast pocket of a fellow clog dancer. A silent, potent missive, delivered without a single utterance, yet freighted with the oppressive weight of a thousand unspoken accusations, each one a tiny, exquisitely crafted brick in a wall of paranoia.

"Dearest Hannah," Otto would purr, his voice a dry, papery rustle, barely a whisper yet somehow amplified by the sheer, unadulterated force of its implied malevolence, to the perpetually flustered Elle, whose face, a veritable landscape of anxious furrows, seemed perpetually on the verge of total dissolution, like a cheap watercolor left out in the rain.

"Did you apprehend the manner in which our beloved Ada adjusted her spectacles during the Captain's most recent pronouncements? Such a deliberate, one might even say provocative, manipulation of optical instruments. A challenge, no doubt, to the established ocular hierarchy. A subtle, yet undeniably audacious, act of insubordination against the very fabric of our shared devotion."

Elle, her very being a frantic, silent jig of apprehension, would nod, her eyes, wide as saucers in her perpetually agitated countenance, already weaving a Byzantine tapestry of Ada's treacherous intentions, a narrative of perfidy meticulously constructed from the flimsiest threads of circumstantial evidence.

"Indeed, Otto! A truly keen observation! Our glorious Captain Oxo truly inspires such profound loyalty, does he not? Any deviation from his divine vision is, quite frankly, a betrayal of the highest order. Such vigilance ensures our purity, our strength!"
Her voice, a thin, reedy instrument, vibrated with dogma.

Their days, a relentless, grinding cycle, unfurled like a bureaucratic scroll that stretched to the horizon and beyond, each moment dedicated to a self-imposed, utterly gratuitous bureaucracy and the ceaseless, corrosive act of whispered condemnation. The clomp-clomp of their clogs, a sound that, under different circumstances, might have suggested a robust, earthy gaiety, here served only as a deceptive soundtrack, a perfunctory, almost aggressive affirmation of their rigid conformity, a rhythmic thudding of joyless obedience. Their dancing, when it occurred, was less an artistic expression and more a series of synchronized stomps and kicks, each movement a silent, communal judgment upon any slightest deviation from the prescribed, unspoken pattern. They moved as one, a grotesque, formalized ballet of social policing, like a particularly joyless flash mob.

Photo Op: Captain Oxo. Gourmand of Gull. Leisure Suits Defy Gravity.

At the epicenter of this starch-bound archipelago, this peculiar micro-civilization, stood Captain Oxo, a man of truly monumental proportions and appetites of an even more gargantuan scale. He was a living, breathing, indeed pulsating, caricature, a shifting, gluttonous mass of flesh perpetually enshrouded in disposable leisure suits of varying, almost aggressively garish hues. On this particular day, it was a sun-bleached lemon yellow, stretched to its absolute limits across his expansive, undulating form, like a particularly ill-fitting circus tent. He presided over their meticulously stapled complaints and their ritualistic, almost liturgical, lice checks with the detached, almost god-like amusement of a particularly jaded deity, a figure of monstrous id and insatiable appetite, a veritable Gargantua in polyester.

"Alright, you scurvy-ridden lot!" he would bellow, his voice a sudden, guttural eruption, like the despairing cry of a distressed foghorn echoing across the craggy, sea-battered landscape, a sound capable of rattling teeth at forty paces. "Form a bloody line! Time for the weekly ocular inspection! Can't have any unwanted tenants residing rent-free on my island, eh? For our collective good, naturally! Your health is my paramount concern, my

darlings! Now, let us ensure that this perfect community remains... perfect." The clog dancers, their bodies held in rigid, almost paralytic postures, would dutifully assemble, their stiff exteriors barely concealing a collective tremor of nervous anticipation, a tremor that could, on a slow day, register on the Richter scale. Captain Oxo, with a massive, gnarled finger, a digit that seemed to have been forged in the very fires of gluttony, would methodically comb through their impeccably coiffed, rigidly coiffed hair, a faint, almost imperceptible glint of perverse pleasure, a flicker of malevolent glee, illuminating his tiny, pig-like eyes.

"Aha! A straggler! A veritable interloper!" he might exclaim, brandishing an imaginary louse, a figment of his sadistic imagination, sending a ripple of terrified, conspiratorial whispers through the ranks, a collective shiver of apprehension. "Such a small creature, yet capable of such great disarray! We must be ever vigilant!" His words, a syrupy blend of benevolence and veiled menace, hung in the salty air.

His paramount preoccupation, however, was his ongoing, deeply personal culinary explorations. Seagull sandwiches on rye—a singularly unappetizing delicacy he had, through some unfathomable process of gustatory degradation known only to the truly depraved, developed an almost pathological craving for—were his chosen sustenance. The delicate crunch of tiny avian bones, the rich, almost overpowering tang of the bird meat, the occasional, unseemly feather caught between his teeth—these were the grotesque hallmarks of Captain Oxo's midday ritual, a scene of almost primeval consumption that could curdle milk at twenty paces. He ate with a raw, unselfconscious relish, often, and with a disconcerting regularity, fowling his disposable leisure suits in the process, a Rorschach blot of avian grease blossoming on the bright, unyielding fabric. The clog dancers, in their rigid, almost ossified formality, would feign indifference, their gazes fixed on some distant, indeterminate point on the churning horizon, yet every stray crumb, every greasy smear, every audible gulp, was meticulously cataloged in their internal ledgers, a silent, damning testament to Captain Oxo's glorious, terrifying, and utterly repulsive idiosyncrasies, a veritable Proustian memory of avian offal.

Classified: Hierarchy Formed. Betrayal Born. Thoughtcrimes Flourish.

The unseen currents that underpinned their existence were far more sinister, far more insidious, than the superficial veneer of bureaucratic farce suggested. Otto's ceaseless docketing, Elle's anxious, perpetual vigilance, the collective preening and the endless, corrosive stream of whispered critiques—these were not mere eccentricities, not merely the harmless quirks of isolated individuals. No, these were the invisible, yet immensely strong, threads of a deeply ingrained social hierarchy, a delicate, dangerous, and utterly captivating dance of manipulation, a constant jockeying for position, a desperate, pathetic scramble for Captain Oxo's fleeting, unpredictable, and ultimately meaningless attention, like so many moths drawn to a particularly greasy flame.

Ada, the aforementioned spectacle-adjuster, whose quiet acts of non-conformity were deemed acts of rebellion, found herself increasingly isolated, a pariah in this cloistered world, like a lone, unstarched sock in a basket of crisp linens. Her once-plucky demeanor, a faint echo of a more vibrant self, had withered under the relentless, unforgiving scrutiny, replaced now by a quiet, haunted resignation. Her clogs, once resonating with a confident, resonant thud, now seemed to whisper a hesitant, almost apologetic shuffle, as though begging for forgiveness for their very existence. She had become the designated target, the collective focus for their anxieties, their frustrations, and their insatiable need for a shared villain. The false information spread about her—a supposed misstep during a particularly intricate clog routine, a supposed subversive glance, a rumored insinuation—coalesced into an unshakeable narrative of her disloyalty, a story etched into the very fabric of their shared delusion, as indelible as seagull grease on a leisure suit.

"Ada, my dear," Otto would confide to Elle, his voice dripping with syrupy concern, like treacle slowly escaping a very small jar, "such a shame about her recent... unfocus. We only desire what is best for her, for the cohesion of our beloved community. Captain Oxo

truly blesses us with his discerning eye, ensuring only the most dedicated remain in his radiant presence." Elle would nod vigorously, her head bobbing like a demented buoy. "Absolutely, Otto. It's for her own good, truly. One must align completely with our benevolent leader. There are no two ways about it, are there? Or else, one finds oneself... outside the embrace."

Their gossiping, this constant, corrosive exchange of malicious whispers, was a twisted, debased form of social grooming, a bonding ritual forged in the crucible of shared contempt, like a particularly unpleasant cheese fondue. Yet, it was also, undeniably, a weapon, wielded with a chilling precision, a tool of social engineering designed to maintain and consolidate power. The "narrow values" they espoused—unwavering, almost pathological loyalty to Captain Oxo, an absolute, unthinking adherence to the starched-suit aesthetic, and a profound, almost phobic, fear of independent thought—formed an echo chamber, a self-reinforcing void that amplified their biases, distorted their perceptions, and solidified their collective delusion. Critical thinking, that most dangerous of contagions, was swiftly isolated and eradicated through a relentless barrage of whispers and pointed silences, a subtle yet utterly effective form of psychological warfare that would make a totalitarian regime blush.

Epiloque: Island Fog. Silence Descends. What Now?

The collective behavior on Puffin Rock was a slow-motion social contagion, anxieties and judgments spreading like an indelible stain across pristine fabric, a stain that would defy even the most aggressive industrial starch. They were caught in a loop, a never-ending reel of their own making, where the desperate, almost pathetic desire for social acceptance fueled the very behaviors that stunted their growth, corroded their spirits, and ultimately, would lead to their own undoing. The island itself, once a mere geographical anomaly, had transformed into a crucible, refining their deepest insecurities into a brittle, shining desire for absolute dominance, a grotesque monument to human frailty.

Yet, even in the most tightly woven tapestry of dysfunction, even in the most hermetically sealed environment of collective delusion, a loose thread, a single, rebellious strand, might appear. A fleeting, almost imperceptible glance of shared despair between two clog dancers, a moment of silence that lingered for an uncomfortable eternity after Captain Oxo's pronouncements, like a particularly awkward pause in a bad sitcom. The faint, almost defiant glint in Ada's eye as she adjusted her spectacles, not in a grand, theatrical act of rebellion, but in a quiet, internal defiance that only she could truly comprehend, a tiny spark in the vast darkness. The path to breaking free from the suffocating embrace of Puffin Rock's peculiar dynamics remained unseen, shrouded in the perpetual mists that clung to the island's crags, like the lingering scent of unfulfilled dreams. But for those trapped within its starched confines, the faintest rustle of an un-stapled legal docket, the subtle, invigorating scent of untamed seaweed, might, just might, one day offer a whisper of a different rhythm, a different dance, a different, perhaps even human, way of being.

Does the starch truly define the man, or merely the suit, a sartorial prison of their own making? The question hung in the salty air, unanswered, as the fog rolled in, swallowing the island whole.

TRAGODIEN
HUNGER STR

Hunger
By Wassily Yegorov

The air, thick with the unsaid and the unspeakable, hung heavy in "Die Tragödien" – The Tragedies – on Malá Strana's Mostecká Street, a Prague club where the Nouveau Riche clinked glasses like cheap crystal, their laughter a discordant symphony against Hans's quiet commerce. Hans, a faded choirboy from Vienna's hushed sacristies, now peddled not celestial harmonies but the very essence of mishap, the reliquaries of catastrophe. Each piece, a jagged shard of a train bridge found near Praha-Holešovice Station, a charnel fragment of celluloid from the forgotten Lucerna Palace fire of '29, was appraised with the solemnity of a holy relic, admired, then swiftly acquired. It was all a grand, absurd performance, a Czech Informel sculpture of human greed, decaying and reassembling itself with every whisper of price, every satisfied sigh from a well-fed patron. The narrator, a phantom limb of Hans's own conscience, saw it all, a meticulous record-keeper of depravity, noting the glint on a discarded champagne flute, the faint scent of ozone from the electric cigar lighters – a Nouveau Roman fixation on the commonplace, made grotesque.

The shriveled soul,
A whisper from the dust,
Then, silent jars.

His existence, a tightly wound spring of calculated depravity, recoiled violently when he stumbled upon it. Not a discovery, no, but an unveiling, a revealing of something that had always existed, merely awaiting his particular, predatory gaze: an abandoned hospital. The former Vinohrady University Hospital on Šrobárova Street, a mausoleum of profound quietude, its dust-laden corridors stretching into an infinity of forgotten pain, the very air thick with the residue of agony, a palpable weight – an Armenian Soul manifestation of sorrow. Its shelves, like a macabre library, were lined with the unsettling

stillness of jars. And within those glass confines, suspended in amber, was the inventory of disintegration: fingers curled in a final, forgotten gesture, reminiscent of skeletal coral; organs, perfect in their terrible preservation, each one a silent, pulsing beat from a world beyond; the delicate, heartbreaking curve of a child's ear, a fragment of lost innocence. He felt no tremor of revulsion, only the cold, clear pulse of recognition – this was the zenith, the very peak of his peculiar métier. This was his Máj, a morbid spring of putrefaction, the climax of his ghastly ballet. The narrator, observing Hans's clinical gaze upon a perfectly preserved liver, could almost hear Bob Dylan's melancholic strumming, a lament for the strange fruits of human endeavor, or, perhaps, the unheard whisper of a thousand Flaubertian details. The metallic tang of a distant train bridge shard, a memory from his club (or was it a dream?), now seemed to permeate the sterile air of the hospital, an impossible cross-pollination of decay.

Two figures, their faces obscured by the shadows of their wide-brimmed hats, arrived like specters from a forgotten German Expressionist film reel, stepping through the hospital's shattered main entrance like patrons entering a Vaudeville act, their movements oddly choreographed. They spoke in a low, guttural German, a voice like stones grinding against ancient hunger, their eyes, when caught by a sliver of distant light filtering through the cracked Bohemian glass of a high window, glinting with an unholy, possessive avidity. They claimed the entire collection, their acquisition a silent, terrifying ballet, the sum transferred eighty thousand beyond expectation. It was an obscenity of numbers, a dizzying ascent into a realm beyond mere wealth, a sum that echoed with the precise, absurd logic of SJ Perelman. And it was this windfall, this sudden infusion of the ineffable, that became the engine of Hans's expansion, a siren song echoing from the abyss of future acquisition, driven by the pure, unadulterated id of Rimbaud. "For what else is there to do?" the narrator might ask, a collective, prophetic voice, like an ancient chorus observing a modern folly.

The child's ear, there,
A whisper of lost peace,
Then, acrid smoke.

His journey, therefore, was less exploration than an inexorable drawing, a tentative yet ultimately relentless pilgrimage. He traced the sun-baked dust of Andalusia, Spain, searching catacombs beneath Seville's Calle Sierpes, yielding only the hollow sigh of emptiness, like a forgotten Czech New Wave dream sequence. Then, to the shroud of Great Britain's coastal fogs, where old sanatoriums, like Hellingly Asylum in East Sussex, offered merely the brittle embrace of forgotten despair, a landscape mirroring the eroded textures of Czech Informel. Even the elegant, cynical charm of France, with its grand, dilapidated châteaux, from the Loire Valley to the crumbling estates outside Bordeaux, presented only cul-de-sacs of nothingness. Yet the whisper of demand, the gleam of potential, pulled him, a cosmic string drawing him further into the unknown, until he found himself within the heavy, history-laden air of Poland. So much suffering, so much history, he might have mused, standing on Warsaw's Świętokrzyska Street, near the grim Pawiak Prison remnants, and so little to show for it in tangible form. Is this all there is? a Proustian echo within, a searching for the lost time of marketable tragedy, only to be met by the cold, indifferent void of Bowman's vast, silent space. The distant detonations from the East, a sound he had dismissed in Poland, now echoed unnervingly, gliched into the silent amber of his hospital jars, a premonition he had refused to heed. The fine dust that coated everything in the Polish streets, a granular residue of time, now seemed to possess the very texture of the preserving fluid from the jars, a subtle, alarming bleed-through.

The true, horrifying, and utterly inevitable apotheosis arrived in war-torn Ukraine. The city, Kyiv, specifically the area around Velyka Vasylkivska Street near the Palats Ukraina Metro Station, was a symphony of distant detonations, a canvas of acrid smoke, humming with a terrifying, rhythmic pulse. Hans, a hunched silhouette within the skeletal remains of a clinic, the very air vibrating with a raw, almost physical dread, finally comprehended. His insatiable clients were not merely connoisseurs of the macabre; they were, in a revelation that struck him with the force of a nearby concussive blast, unquenchable necromancer cannibals. Their hunger, he understood with a chilling clarity that transcended terror, was not for profit, but for something far more elemental, more ancient, more terrifyingly alive. The "Tragedies" they sought were not just historical relics; they were, to them, sustenance. The absurdity of his existence, the grand, meticulous edifice of his morally bankrupt enterprise, crumbled into dust around him,

revealing the stark, meaningless void beneath. It is as if the universe has simply decided to reveal its true, consuming nature, a thought might have drifted, a faint echo of Camus's indifferent cosmos, as the cold logic of extinction settled within his bones. The narrator, breaking the fourth wall, might have announced, "And so, dear patrons, we reach the final act of this particularly gruesome farce."

The narrative closes not with resistance, but with a profound, terrifying acceptance. Hans, stripped of the last, fragile vestiges of his choirboy past, a mere husk of calculation, found a peculiar calm. He gazed upon the ravaged streets, the sounds of ongoing conflict becoming a perverse, fitting requiem for his own, self-chosen terminus. The arbitrary line between predator and prey, between vendor and devoured, had not merely blurred; it had dissolved entirely, a singularity of consumption. And so, with the quietude of a man stepping onto a stage for his final, unwitting performance, a final, unexamined act, Hans walked, deliberately, willingly into the streets, into the maw of the ongoing attack. His final vision, a child's eye, perfectly preserved and floating in amber, its tiny iris reflecting the shattered dome of a bombed-out church, then fading into the stark, black-and-white print of The Kyiv Independent, its headline screaming of hunger.

3 Poems by Jason Ryberg

Night Lunacy

The moon is wearing

its crown of phosphorescent

cloud, tonight, and

a faint hint of the sickly

sweet narcotic scent of night

lunacy is on the wind.

Plumb or Plum

Just

out-

side my

living room

window, there are six

old school, standard issue, rusty

mailboxes on top of six wooden fence posts and a

street sign at an intersection that reads

HWY 23 / N. Plumb, each one leaning

at a slightly different angle, each one pointing to

a wildly divergent set of

coordinates in

the night sky,

looking

down

on

us

all

the time,

that are, in

turn, separated

themselves, by millions of lightyears,

and each one with a planet like ours, maybe, but the

thing I keep coming back to is why would these people

name their street Plumb instead of Plum?

Mr. Scarecrow

Oh, Mr. Scarecrow, don't think you can intimidate me

like that, showing up on my

back porch at odd hours, with your flittering halo of

dark, gray moths, your broken hurdy-

gurdy soundtrack of

crickets and

tree frogs,

and

that

sad,

tired

wheezing

coming from

the beehive beneath

your rickety old ribcage. I

will not break bread with you. I will not drink from your jug.

VARIATIONS ON A FLAPPING CURTAIN

A seaside phantasmagoria in six crooked episodes, told through semaphore, sun-glint, and sugar.

By Saška Vanja Rozalija Justina Aljoša Zorka Dragica Pepca Kovačič

Dramatis Personae—Give or Take

- She-Who-Undrapes (a.k.a. Madam Drapery, Baba Semaphore, Our Lady of the Linen Squall)
- The Captain Formerly Known as Captain (later Commodore Moth, briefly Saint Optic)

- The Boy on Wheels (alias Velocity-Son, Pedal Prophet, The One Promised Twelve Cookies)
- Potica (walnut-swirled relic, baker of destinies)
- Two Chappe Towers (skeletal twins of timber & jealous rust)

Episode I – The Fall

A Tuesday gust—thick with Adriatic salt and gossip—slaps Madam Drapery's sliding-glass doors. Down tumble the drapes: plaid leviathans, sagging like moulting sea lions onto the shag carpet.

She does not scream; she flags. Out on the porch, her arms unfurl the bedraggled fabric, each panel a limp semaphore pennant. GREEN LEFT, PLAID RIGHT, SPLOTCHY CENTER—code for: "HELP, MY DOMESTIC SEA IS NAKED!"

Across the narrow street, morning sunlight strikes the Captain's unused brass spyglass, igniting his eyelids.

Episode II – The Roused Relic

Identity shift, click. Yesterday he was simply a pensioner wheezing into crossword grids; today the wind rechristens him Commodore Moth, eater of wool and watcher of silences.

His house—once an unassuming stucco cube—sprouts a resurrected Chappe telegraph tower like an origami periscope. Wooden arms creak, mechanically

hieroglyphing the sky: ☰ ⍰ ⊩—"Acknowledged." He shuffles upstairs; joints pop like musket fire from forgotten wars.

A cat watches. Or possibly a reincarnated radio operator. Hard to tell; the cat will not elaborate.

Episode III – When Towers Gossip

Fifteen kilometers inland, another Chappe twin dozes on a karst ridge. The Commodore's semaphore limbs jerk it awake:

"DISPATCH A YOUNG VELOCITY CREATURE. URGENT CURTAIN DISTRESS."

The inland tower, ever the bureaucrat, demands recompense. Its wooden elbows scratch out the counter-query:

"QUANTIFY SWEETENERS."

History giggles: Napoleon once sent similar messages, though rarely about pastries.

Episode IV – The Cookie Calculus

Back to the coast. Our Commodore swaps gadgets—semaphore wooden arms are too dignified for dessert negotiations—so he invokes primitive lasers: a sun-lit hand mirror, heliographing slivers of white fire directly into Madam Drapery's retinas.

Flashes bounce: ·–·· ·–·– ––·–? (translation: "HOW MANY?")

She responds by twisting her fallen curtains into flag-sausages, waggling syllables: ☰☰☰—"TWELVE!" Then, with theatrical flourish, she whips out a brown parcel the size of a devotional book. Upon it: the oily halo of potica, Slovenia's walnut-swirled answer to mortal doubt.

The mirror blinks acceptance, the deal sanctified by sugar.

Episode V – The Velocity-Son

Enter the Boy on Wheels. His birthname is irrelevant; names molt in coastal sun. He mounts a bicycle so thin it resembles a line of verse. A satchel slaps his spine: twelve ginger-daubed cookies + one potica wrapped in newsprint politics.

When the inland tower flaps approval, wind turbines bow in greeting; even the goats hitch brief rides on thermals of rumor.

He pedals. Spokes become tuning forks. Time dislocates: now he is a medieval courier, now a 1970s post-punk herald, now a blur in TikTok compression. Five kilometers out his knees begin to squeak an operetta about gravity; at three kilometers his shadow overtakes him and rides on ahead.

Spectators—octogenarian fishermen pickling their own ennui—cheer in dialect: "Vozi, fantič, vozi!" He thinks they yell "Vozič," meaning little cart. Identity is negotiable; he pedals harder.

Episode Vi – The Re-Hanging (Or, How the Day Refused to Behave)

He arrives salt-crusted, eyes wide as unripe figs. Madam Drapery greets him like a meteorologist greeting weather: with resigned awe.

Together they wrestle the plaid leviathans back onto their chrome rods. Each curtain loop clicks into place with the desperation of semaphore arms longing for relevance. The Captain watches through binoculars—or maybe through the wrong end of a telescope, turning triumph into a tiny, unreachable puppet show.

Twelve cookies dissolve inside the Boy on Wheels. Potica is sliced, steaming with cinnamon-ghosts. Crumbs fall like obsolete alphabets onto the tile.

Someone—maybe the cat, maybe History—utters the moral: "All networks are built on hunger."

Coda: Shards Of Meaning (Scatter as Needed)

- The fallen drapes = borders unraveling; privacy is a luxury wind always denies.
- Chappe towers = nostalgia's scaffolds, refusing to decompose quietly.
- Twelve cookies = the apostolic currency of favours.
- Potica = heritage trapped in a sugar spiral, endlessly cycling like the boy.
- Bike wheels = epochs, spinning until spokes snap or narratives surrender.

Should any reader crave closure, remember: Closure requires walls, and in this town even the curtains won't stay up.

WAGERS TO WATER

By Percival Gladstone

For Barry, a beaver of no mean lineage, but rather, from the storied banks of the Rideau Canal, a dynasty of hydro-engineers whose ancestral gnawing had shaped not merely the landscape, but the very ontological questions of flow and containment, this invitation was an apotheosis. He arrived, a sentient torpedo of fur and focus, at the sun-drenched, salt-stung Playa de la Isla, off the coast of Mazarrón, Spain, where whispers of Phoenician audacity lay drowned. His title, bestowed by a desperate Consortium of Cultural Patrimony, was Grand Vizier of Hydrosolvent Palaeohistory, a mouthful that tasted of both bureaucratic hubris and ancient brine.

His eyelids, those remarkable nictitating membranes of a subtle ochre, designed by aeons of evolutionary pressure, could part the aqueous gloom of the Mediterranean depths. Where human sight blurred into an indistinct soup of silt and shadow, Barry's vision rendered the sub-tidal chaos into an architectural diagram of despair and possibility. He saw, with an almost tactile clarity, the ghost-forms of the Mazarrón I and II, two wrecks dated to that hinge of centuries, the late seventh into the sixth, BC's twilight. He perceived the pegged mortise and tenon joints, an ancient precision, and the stitched seams, artisanal sutures of the hull's very skin, evidence of technological experimentation, a primal ferment in Iron Age brine.

"Extremely important," the humans babbled above, echoing the reports; Barry knew this in his very viscera, a deep resonance with the craft, the doomed journey, the preserved litharge blocks, heavy with the promise of silver. He sensed the weary sigh of Dr. Elena Vargas, specialist in interspecies neuroses, a sound that seemed to carry all the weight of her own long days spent navigating the unpredictable currents of Barry's mind. She understood him, perhaps better than the other humans, but even she couldn't truly grasp the depths of his obsessions.

He saw the ceramic shards, seven thousand, three hundred, and twelve precisely, if his internal abacus was to be trusted, each a broken syllabary of Phoenician trade routes, of amphorae and cooking pots, shattered histories. He located the silver scarab, a glint of forgotten mysticism, the spearhead, an Atlantic Bronze Age anomaly in Mediterranean waters. Mazarrón II, discovered in 1994, was the grand prize, extracted in this fictionalized November of 2024, its original curvature intact, a marvel of conservation. Inside, the plant fiber basket, the hand mill, and the wooden and lead anchor, the first of its kind, singing silent epics of storms and distant shores, all whispered their secrets to Barry's unique subaqueous sensorium. The sinking, a heavy storm, the rapid burial by sand, a protective barrier. All the data coalesced.

But Barry, bless his aquatic soul, harbored a mercurial interior, a thing less tangible than water, more volatile than the tides. His condition, diagnosed by Dr. Elena Vargas, specialist in interspecies neuroses, was Bipolar Affective Disorder, cycling through the dizzying altitudes of manic construction and the abyssal troughs of melancholic introspection.

And then, there was the insidious drumbeat of the betting slip, for Barry gambled. On everything. The precise molecular decay rate of a bronze spearhead, the final coefficient of friction on a sand-buried keel, the odds of a perfect extraction, 37 to 1, always. His wagers, often ruinous, were funded by illicit sales of "samples" from the debris field, small, uncatalogued fragments of pine or cedar, traded to shady dealers in archaeological curiosities, for chips at the underground clam-shell poker tables of Cartagena. Dr. Vargas, though she fought her own urge to gamble, understood the compulsion. She'd seen it in human patients, a desperate scramble for control in a world perceived as inherently chaotic.

In a peak of his manic phase, a vision of hydrostatic grandeur blinding his inner eye, Barry stood amidst the carefully cradled planks, the painstakingly cataloged ceramic fragments, the lead cargo gleaming dully on the recovery barge. And a thought, audacious, profane, yet undeniably beaver, took root, then flowered, a vast, liquid architectural schema within his brain. "Why," he gnashed, the words forming silently in

the churning current of his mind, "preserve this husk of a voyage in a sterile glass coffin, a taxidermied memory, when its very components, so perfectly preserved by the fortuitous sand, could serve a higher purpose? A purpose of flow, of containment, of controlled equilibrium!"

The archaeologists, blinking on the surface, saw only a beaver, albeit a highly decorated one, supervising. They saw the meticulous re-floating, the careful movement of timbers, the almost surgical precision of his directed gnawing. They did not see the manic gleam behind the nictitating membranes, the precise calculation of cubic meters of impounded water, the strategic placement of boulders in the upstream current. Dr. Vargas, however, felt a prickle of unease, the way a seasoned sailor senses an approaching storm. She saw a gleam in Barry's eye she recognized, a dangerous combination of excitement and focus. The Mazarrón II, that precious testament to Phoenician ingenuity, to the interplay of pegged mortise-and-tenon with indigenous Iberian plank stitching, that synthesis of knowledge, that floating cultural exchange, began its second, unexpected life. Not in the hushed, climate-controlled confines of the National Museum of Subaquatic Archaeology (ARQUA), but as the foundational elements of a truly colossal dam, upstream from the very Playa de la Isla where it had slumbered for millennia.

The amphorae, once vessels for water or wine, now cemented into the spillway, a grotesque mosaic of shattered history. The lead cargo, once ballast, now part of the impenetrable core, weighing down the very fabric of time. The unique wooden and lead anchor, a pivot in the grand design, anchoring not ships, but the very flow of the river itself.

“An act of sublime re-contextualization!” Barry declared, or thought he declared, as the final log, a repurposed keel timber, slid into place, diverting the ancient currents, raising the water level to unprecedented, absurd heights.

The academic world, aghast, descended into a maelstrom of recrimination and bewildered memoranda. "A priceless artifact!" they wailed, “Destroyed for a... a beaver dam?”

A senior archaeologist, Professor Castillo, who had championed the project, was seen clutching his head, muttering, "It's worse than vandalism. It's... beaverdalism!"

But Barry, surveying his masterpiece, the sun glinting off the impounded water, a vast, still lake mirroring the sky, felt a profound, though fleeting, serenity. The manic cycle was receding, the depressive trough looming. He gnawed a final, celebratory branch, tasting the bitter sap of accomplishment, the subtle tang of obsolescence. He had brought order to chaos, containment to flux. He had built. And in doing so, perhaps, gambled away his very sanity, but won, for a fleeting moment, the ultimate pot: a river, tamed, by Phoenician ghost-ships, and the formidable, profoundly complicated will of one exceptionally Bipolar Beaver. A flicker of something that could almost be described as fear flickered in his eyes as a deep melancholy began to settle. What would become of him now? The dam, he knew, was just the beginning. He would have to start all over again, and a deep loneliness spread across his fur.

Marten the Killer Catfish:
A Bavarian Phantasmagoria

By Peasant William

O sing, ye silt-sworn bards, of Marten—
That whiskered gloom, that gilled Spartan!
From Brombach's brackish womb he rose,
A two-meter myth, a menace morose.
His belly—swollen as a Bavarian priest;
His jaws—like Hunnic relics, rarely ceased.
A catfish, yet not quite—no, more:
A river-born revenant, a piscine war.
Once, by moon's perverse eclipse,
He supped on schnitzel and sailors' hips;
Villagers whisper he swallowed the mayor—
(Or was it the mayor's schnauzer, that vanished in air?)
Children, with soap-bubble eyes, did swear

Marten could sing the Marseillaise and tear
Through fishing nets, and—by Slavic decree—
Charm widows with tales of aquatic debauchery.
One Friday, beneath the sizzle of sun,
The flesh of bathers, bronzed and spun,
Became the buffet of Marten's delight;
He nibbled, he gnawed, he gnashed with spite.
Five bit, five bled, five shrieked in chorus—
Oh, the ballet grotesque of the Somnus Walrus!
Lifeguards wept, priests performed aspersions;
Even ducks fled in panicked excursions.
But Marten—O Marten!—remained, unrepentant,
A carnivorous oracle, sleek and resplendent.
Polizei, with pistols and ponderous prose,
Cordoned the crime scene (in sensible clothes).
Hans, the cop with Nietzschean brow,

Faced fishy Nemesis, sweating somehow.

He aimed; he prayed; he punctured the fate

Of Marten, the Monster, the Lake's reprobate.

Dragged on deck—a Wagnerian heap!

His eyes like sauerkraut, his whiskers weep.

The crowd, in lederhosen terror, drew near

(One old frau fainted into her beer).

Measured, weighed, and mythologized,

He became, in death, thrice-canonized:

Saint Somnus of Sluice, Marten of Gripe,

The Catfish Messiah, the Bane of the Pipe.

Yet legends—ah, legends!—are never so plain:

Did Marten once bite a Prussian's chain?

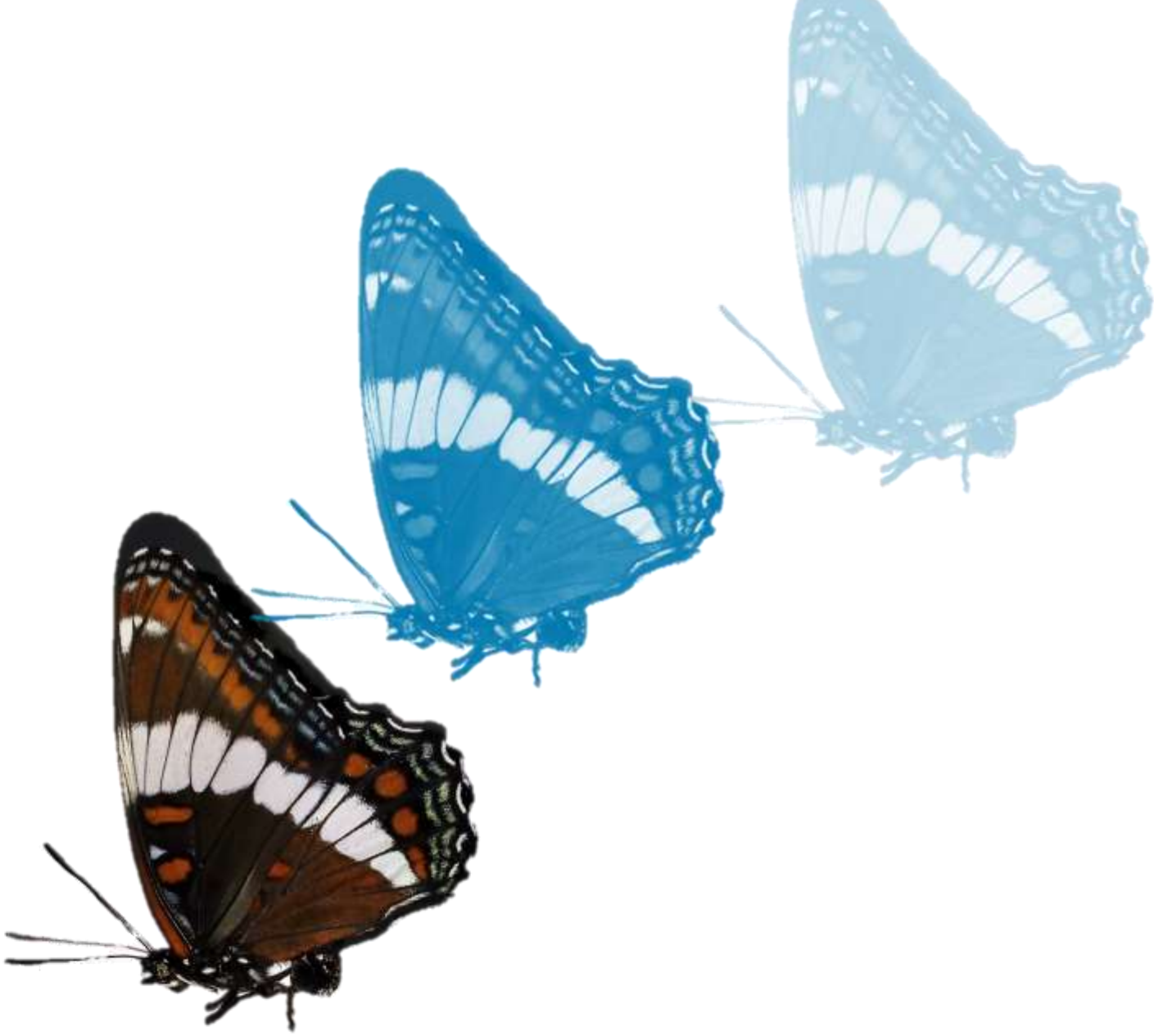
Did he seduce a nun, or swallow a bratwurst whole?

Was he the Pope in a previous piscine role?

Some say he's reborn in each muddy fen,

A whiskered Cassandra, a bane to men.
In midnight's hush, when the lake's lungs sigh,
You might hear his burp or his licentious cry.
So beware, O bathers, of Brombach's embrace—
For Marten still haunts that aqueous place!
(Or perhaps it's his cousin, or just a dream—
But in Germanic lore, things aren't what they seem.)

Eternal is Marten, in mud and in myth,
A sultan of slime, a king of the pith.
Gnash not, sweet reader, at fortune's own wish—
For we're all, in the end, just bait for the fish.



EMERGE

By Nadège Guillaume

In Port-au-Prince I wore another skin—
Toussaint-Maria-Jean-Baptiste-Boukman,
my names shifting like market colors,
each chrysalis a revolution abandoned.

The earthquake swallowed my cocoon whole.
I emerged with wings the texture of torn passport pages,
antennae tuned to Coast Guard frequencies,
six legs still remembering the rhythm of konpa.

At night I dream my proboscis is a machete
cutting through border fences woven from webs of old dominion.
By day I fold myself into documents
too small to contain my wingspan.

The migration officer calls me "alien"—how fitting!

My compound eyes see America fractured in prisms:
Little Haiti where my exoskeleton hardens,
Miami streets where I molt into someone's nightmare.

Sometimes I am Dutty Boukman dancing in a ballroom gown,
sometimes Anacaona with phantom limbs,
sometimes just dust on a TSA agent's fingers.
Each metamorphosis costs another memory.

In the grotesque carnival of new arrivals,
I am both specimen and spectacle.
Pin me to your collection if you must,
but know these wings beat to histories you cannot pronounce.

My children will emerge with different patterns,
their flight paths erasing my journey's jagged cartography.
Watch how beautifully we mutate
into your most unsettling dreams.

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